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*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

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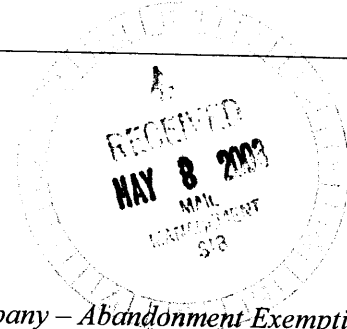
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F. LAWRENCE OAKS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

E1-196

April 24, 2003

Section of Environmental Analysis  
Surface Transportation Board  
1925 K. Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20423



RE: Docket No. AB-33 (Sub-No. 163X), *Union Pacific Railroad Company – Abandonment Exemption – in Lamar and Fannin Counties, TX* and  
Docket No. AB-364 (Sub-No. 8X), *Texas Northeastern Division, Mid-Michigan Railroad Inc. – Discontinuance Exemption – in Lamar and Fannin Counties, TX*

Dear Surface Transportation Board Representative:

We have received and reviewed the Combined Environmental and Historical Report for the above referenced project. Although we initially determined that no historic properties would be affected by this abandonment and discontinuance, we were subsequently provided with additional information, not included in the report, indicating that the rail line does have historical significance.

According to a historical summary submitted to us, a copy of which is enclosed, the rail line exhibits distinctive engineering features including the use of 85-lb. rails and a unique, regional bridge construction method whereby the ties and rails “float” on a bed of gravel set in a closed metal pan. Historic train stations at Bonham and Paris also remain in their original locations, adjacent to the railroad right-of-way, as do substantial remnants of a significant early highway, the predecessor to US 82.

With significant historical features and few changes since the 1930s, the entire rail corridor between Paris and Bells could potentially qualify for listing in the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district. At least one such district has already been listed in Texas, and local parties have expressed interest in nominating the rail corridor for National Register designation. Because the abandonment and discontinuance would affect this potential National Register district, we anticipate full compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act in conjunction with the Environmental Assessment process. We feel that further survey and research efforts are needed to fully evaluate the line’s historical significance and integrity, and ask that consultation with our agency be integrated into your review.

We look forward to further consultation with your office and hope to maintain a partnership that will foster effective historic preservation. Thank you for your cooperation in this federal review process, and for your efforts to preserve the irreplaceable heritage of Texas. If you have any questions or if we can be of further assistance, please contact me at 512/463-5942.

Sincerely,

Peter Ketter, Historian  
for F. Lawrence Oaks, SHPO

Enclosure

cc (w/enclosure): Mark H. Shumate, Jr., Esq., UP Representative  
Gary A. Laakso, Esq., and Louis E. Gitomer, Esq., TNER Representatives

## ***Texas and Pacific Railway's***

### **Transcontinental Division Railroad Line**

### **In Grayson, Fannin and Lamar Counties**

The remnant of the Texas and Pacific Railway's former Transcontinental Division, currently sought for preservation and continued operation by the Fannin County Rural Rail District, is one with origins prior to the Civil War. As many railway lines were merged into larger companies and either modernized or scrapped, the Transcontinental line connecting Sherman and Paris has retained much of its unique historic character, and its "fixed plant" (right of way, rails, ties, bridges, depots, ect.) reflects the state of the art for Great Depression Era/WWII branch line railroads. Approximately 70 miles long, it still has original depots at Sherman, Bonham, and Paris. The 1880's wooden stationhouse from Windom is in private hands located off line.

This line is now owned by the Union Pacific Railroad of Omaha, Nebraska, and leased by shortline conglomerate Rail America, of Boca Raton, Florida. On, or about April 29, 2003 it will become subject to abandonment proceedings before the Surface Transportation Board in Washington, DC. If it is not saved through the efforts of the FCRRD who need to preserve the line for freight service, the state of Texas will lose a unique and nationally important historic asset.

### **Early History**

The earliest effort to build a railroad east and west across the Red River Valley of North Texas began when J W Throckmorton, J C Hill, L C Compton, W T Scott, Rufus Doane, et al, were granted a charter on February 16, 1852 to incorporate the *Vicksburg and El Paso Railroad Company*. Somehow, in the body of the bill, the company's name got changed to the *Texas Western Railroad Company*. It was a proposed transcontinental route, and construction was to commence at a point on the eastern boundary of Texas and push west to El Paso. It was granted eight sections of state owned land per mile, but only if construction started in four years, and ten miles completed in five.

Despite the best efforts of its promoters, financiers, and even help from Governor Bell, construction never got under way until the line was re-chartered *The Southern Pacific Railway* (no relation to the later Southern Pacific lines) in August of 1856. Materials and equipment were handled up the Red River. Just before the Civil War, they had completed 27 miles of railroad between Swansons' Landing and Marshall. They operated for some time without a locomotive due to the difficulty in navigating the Red River, and employed oxen in its stead. Accounts record that three yoke of oxen made up the road first motive power, and would pull cars uphill, at the top the oxen loaded onto a car, and the train allowed to coast as far as possible.

Construction stalled at the onset of Secession, and on October 19, 1861, Jephtha Fowkes, the primary owner of the road place the following ad in the *New Orleans Picayune*: "Southern Pacific RR, 1000 slaves wanted for hire or purchase. We shall purchase or hire, for a term of five years, Five Hundred or a Thousand, to work on the Southern Pacific Railroad in Texas-immediately west of Shreveport Louisiana-in a region secure and protected from invasion or molestation during the conflict which shall exist between the two sections of this country. The country through which the road passes is entirely healthy and for the distance of some 400or 500 miles west of Shreveport, it penetrates one of the finest agricultural countries on the continent of America."

Not only were they unable to secure labor to continue construction, General Magruder took up most of the railroad and relocated between Marshall and Jonesville to help supply Confederate forces there. By the close of the war, the efforts to complete the project, as well as the property itself, were ravaged.

The other predecessor effort that led to this road was actually headquartered at Paris. Led by George Wright, the *Memphis, El Paso and Pacific* was organized on May 9, 1856. Its charter stated that it intended to begin at the Red River near a point called White Oak Shoals, and extend a line up to the headwaters of the Trinity River, cross the Brazos River near Belknap, and on to the Rio Grande at El Paso. The company was given the right to join the *Southern Pacific* near present day Dallas.

The Transcontinental Division largely followed the proposed route, and actually graded about fifty seven miles of right of way on either side of Paris by 1861 when the war ended all work, leaving the five miles of railroad to wait out the conflict.

## Reconstruction and Completion

Under the Reconstruction government, all of the assets of the *M, EP&P* and the *SP* came under the authority of the *Southern Transcontinental Railroad* (from which the division acquired its name). Even though this charter was granted on July 27 of 1870, the promoters had been working to continue construction in the years before. A news item in the Jefferson Jimplecute paper on December 3 the year previous stated that there were over 700 men working on the line, and if navigation could improve on the Red River and needed supplies had that they would (hopefully) reach Paris by June. The paper also recorded a significant footnote to Texas cultural history: while the ethnicity of most railroad construction labor was made up of freed African Americans, and recently immigrated Irish workers, the steamboat was headed upriver with a hundred Chinese. This likely didn't happen in a vacuum, as General Grenville Dodge was soon to be hired from the builders of the first transcontinental railroad, where the Chinese workers gained a reputation as first rate railroad builders. It is thought several hundred were eventually employed.

The city of Sherman was anxious for another railroad, and eighty four thousand dollars worth of bonds to secure the *Southern Transcontinental* in 1872. In the meantime, the *Southern Transcontinental* reorganized as *The Texas and Pacific*. Construction stalled as more financing was raised, and the cities that had granted rights of way and bond contributions had also set time limits. In order to satisfy a loophole in the contracts that required some sort of activity and service to be provided, the *M, EP, &P*, hired an elderly freed slave named Jerry Nolen to ride a mule and cart up and down the graded right of way from Sherman toward Bonham daily. This was continued under the *Southern Transcontinental* and *T&P* until completion.

The section from Brookston (eight miles west of Paris) Sherman was completed by December, 1873. The line was finished to Paris by 1875, and connected with Texarkana the following year.

## Characteristics of the Line

The railroad is what the old timers called a "ridge runner," *ie* in order to avoid heavy fills as much as possible, the right of way follows the natural contours of the land. The Transcontinental Division largely follows the ridge that divides the Red and Sulphur rivers. The original surveys stated that the line running west out of Texarkana followed this ridge, passing a mile south of Myrtle Springs, went through Rice Prairie, three miles north of Boston, and crossed into Red River county on property owned by a Mrs. Young. It went up the Sand Creek valley and passed north of Clarksville, crossing Kickapoo Creek to traverse the Blossom Prairie into Paris. The survey then crossed the headwaters of Pine Creek along the dividing ridge by Rutherfords, Honey Grove, Gobers, and between the Sulphur and Bois'dArc Creek near Bonham.

Sadly, the line between Paris and New Boston was scrapped by the Union Pacific in 1995. The remnant between Paris and Sherman is still intact, and was last operated by Rail America. The Bonham-Paris segment is under abandonment threat as of April 29, 2003 with the line to Bells to follow at some later date. At Bells, the line connects with a segment of the former Missouri Kansas Texas RR, and is currently being operated to serve as a conduit for rock aggregate to the Metroplex.

The Bells-Paris line has been the focus of the Fannin County Rural Rail District. It is the goal to preserve this line for freight rail customers, and if feasible, operating an historic passenger railroad attraction.

## Unique Historic Assets

This railroad has been maintained in a state relatively unchanged since the 1930's. Except for a change in the industries the line serves, the railroad still reflects its heritage as a cotton, corn and cattle carrying secondary line. The Texas and Pacific was the first railroad in the state to use heavy, modern 110 lb per yard rail on its system, using it on its main routes by WWI. However, the Transcontinental Division was only upgraded to a 85 lb per yard rail.

85 pound rail was referred to as "old MOP section" rail by older railroad men as it was unique and seldom used by any company except the Missouri Pacific Railroad and its subsidiaries, of which the T&P was one. Most western railroads of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were originally constructed with rails that weighed 56 pounds to the yard, which was fine when they were running locomotives that weight about 40 tons.

However, soon after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, engines weighing over 100 tons were coming into use pulling cars that weighed 50 tons when loaded. The older rail just wasn't up to the task, so most railroad companies settled upon a 90 lb per yard section. The Missouri Pacific and Texas & Pacific wanted the benefits of heavier rail, but not the price. Since new rail was rolled to a customer's specification and sold by weight, the MOP and T&P used 85 lb rail as a compromise. This is some of the last of its kind in Texas.

The bridges on the line are of the once common wooden pile ballasted deck type. This type of trestle, where the timber supports a closed top (in this instance it is lined with heavy galvanized metal, forming a sort of trough) designed to hold ballast rock in which the track rests, was developed specifically for the geologic conditions that exist in North Texas.

Traditional pile trestles have the rails spiked directly to ties securely affixed to the supports. This approach works fine in stable soil environments, where the ground doesn't swell and crack due to climatic shifts and seasonal weather conditions, but in the waxy, gumbo soils of North Texas, rails firmly anchored to a stationary bridge that connect with rails that are acting with the dynamics of the soil will soon kink and break. This dynamic, seasonal swelling and contracting of the soil is nicknamed "the Gumbo Heaves," and the ballast deck bridge was the solution. In effect, the track on the bridge is allowed limited movement, to "float" as it were, in the rock ballast on top of the bridge deck. This allowed the ground and grades on either side of the bridge to react naturally, and the track would remain unaffected on top.

There are about 23 structures of this type, wood being the primary material, on the line between Bonham and Paris, all tracing their design to the upgrades instituted in the 1930's. Very few bridges of this type remain in actual railroad service, as the mainlines have all modernized their bridges to those of concrete and steel construction. Even the state operated historic park Texas State Railroad has all concrete bridges replacing its wooden ones. The trestles on this line should last indefinitely with regular maintenance and renewal.

Another interesting feature of this line is in some of the approaches of old highway to grade crossings in Lamar county. The original predecessor to today's Highway 82 was a narrow, barely two lane, poured concrete affair, sections of which are in a remarkable state of preservation and are still in use. What is unique is the "hairpin approached" to the points where the road crosses the railway line. The Highway

parallels the railroad, so to get across it has to turn ninety degrees, and then back parallel again. The 1920's solution to getting drivers to slow down and Stop, Look and Listen before crossing a railroad without wrecking on a ninety degree turn? As the Highway runs alongside the track, upon approaching a crossing the road swings away from the railroad before turning at right angle, crosses the railroad, enters another broad hairpin turn and paralleling the railroad again. (See diagrams and photos). One would be hard pressed to find such a rail-highway crossing interface any where else.

When considering this railroad *en toto*, one should be surprised at the fact that despite it only being 62 miles in length, that it has four historic depots along its length. At Sherman, Bonham, and Paris, the original Texas and Pacific depots still exist in their original locations. The Bonham Depot, owned by the city, and the Paris Depot, privately owned, are brick structures dating to WW1. The Sherman depot, used as offices by the Texas and Northeastern RR ( a Rail America subsidiary), is a wooden structure of the same vintage. Amazingly, the depot building from Windom is in private hands, located offline in Bonham. This structure dates to about 1877. There is much interest in relocating it to its original location in Windom upon preservation of the railroad.

## Notes of Historic Interest

This railroad is a prime example of a bucolic, rural line connecting agricultural areas and small towns to the rest of the world. There is much history about it that one would be unable to find elsewhere. It is an artifact that, while still useful to the communities it serves, can tell us much about the past. This story is written in the fabric of the line.

Much of the character and historic qualities of the line are due to upgrades that occurred due to events in other parts of the world. When John Lancaster became receiver for the line in 1916, he became convinced that following the sinking of the Lusitania, the US could not avoid the war in Europe. In response, he began a program of improvement for the Texas & Pacific. The mainlines were relaid with heavy 110 lb rail, and wooden depots in larger cities were replaced by brick. Although the war halted much of work, the depots at Bonham and Paris reflect this effort. This is also when the unique 85 lb "MOP section" rail began to appear on the division.

In late 1933, the Texas & Pacific purchased a hybrid self propelled railway passenger car that was a cross between automotive and rail technology specifically for use on this railroad. Built by the Budd Rail Car in partnership with Goodyear Tire, the "Silver Slipper" was a stainless steel and Art Deco attempt to use pneumatic tires under a railroad car. Today it would be an experiment done by a transit authority, but the T&P wanted to replace the steam powered passenger-mail trains 31-32 Ft Worth - Texarkana by way of Sherman over the Transcontinental division. The wheel system was designed in France by Michelin, and it was powered by American La France gasoline engines. It was a two unit set and was not only the first stainless steel, rubber tired train in Texas, it also featured refrigerated air.

To quote author Bert Pennypacker, "An almost unbelievable series of derailments, breakdowns, and other ills continued to plague the silver lemon as weeks and months went by. No one ever recalls a trouble free trip ever having been made between Ft Worth and Texarkana, although the train nearly made it once- until a grade crossing accident spoiled the trip." The T&P eventually scrapped it without ever making a penny on it.

In 1937 Lancaster again became convinced of the certainty of war, and new that railroads would be essential to winning any conflict against "Hitlarism." It was during this rebuilding program that the railroads current historic fiber was largely evolved. This was when most of the ballast deck bridges were installed, strengthened and improved.

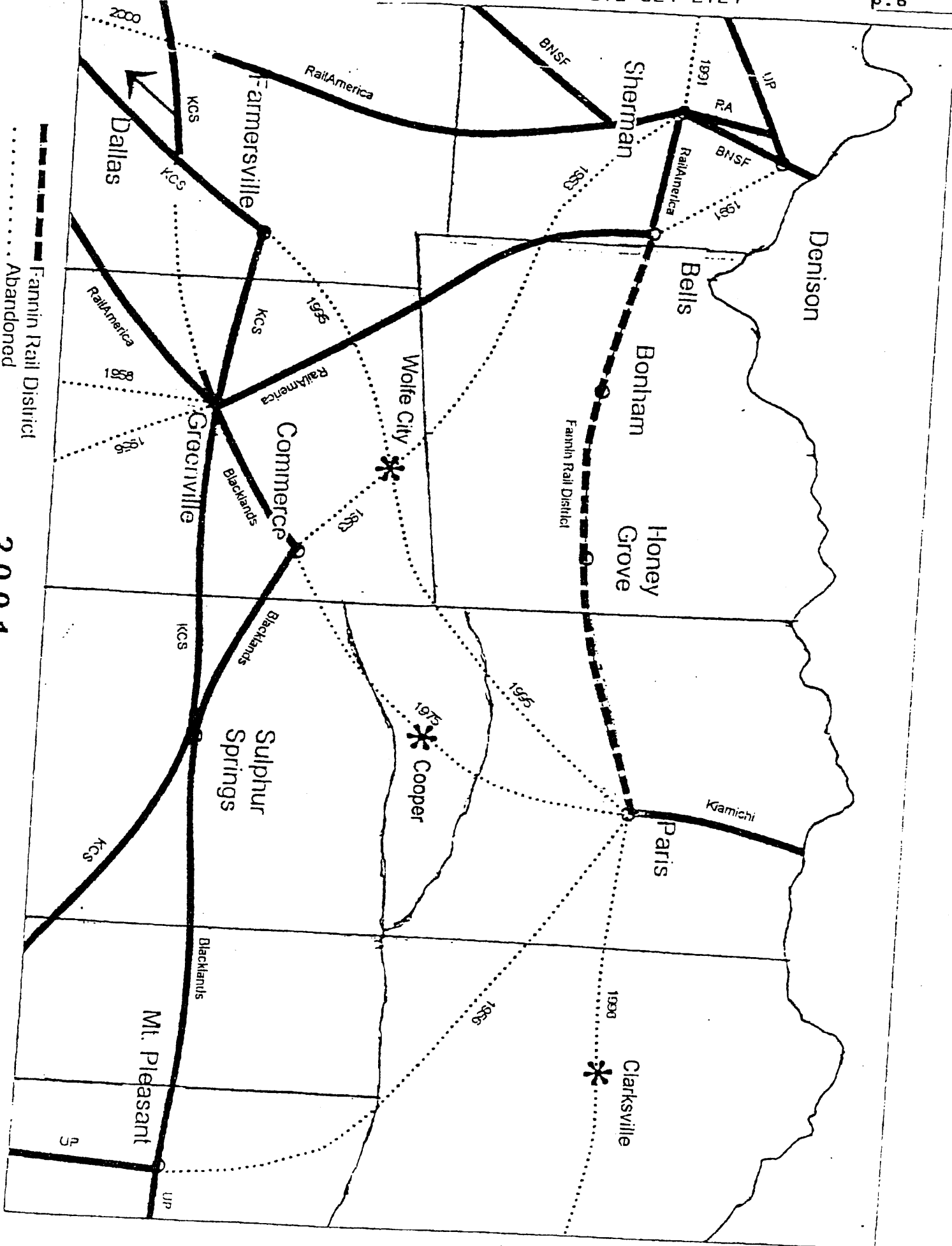
Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn used to catch the train at the Bonham depot to tend to the business of the nation until passenger service was suspended in 1951 and he began travelling by road to Denison to get passenger service.

Populist presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan campaigned all along the route, delivering his "Cross of Gold" speech from the back of a passenger car. It is also known that during the 1948 presidential contest, the POTUS private car "Ferdinand Magellan" overnigheted in front of the Bonham depot with Harry and Bess Truman inside.

Points for Preservation

--- Fannin Rail District  
..... Abandoned  
—— Existing

2001



Old Highway Crossings  
Lower Country, It  
Along TP Between  
Honey Grove and Harris

Not to scale

